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MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Comments on DIA Article, A Review of the Soviet Helicopter Carrier, of 8 April 1968

1. The article on which you have requested OSR views is lengthy and detailed. I believe that our comments, to be fully useful to you, must be presented in some detail also.

2. The article was produced by DIA's Scientific and Technical Intelligence Directorate and presents a factual review of the development of the Soviet helicopter carrier. The chronological account of the ship's construction progress is accurate and the presentation of basic characteristics, radar, armament, propulsion and helicopters agree generally with community positions -- except for factors listed in Paragraph 4. DIA states that, based on ship's characteristics, a single mission cannot be defined but that its capabilities indicate that it will fulfill a major requirement of the Soviet naval forces. The conclusion is that the primary role of the ship could be either ASW or a command ship in an intervention force, with the latter being favored.

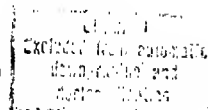
3. OSR continues to believe that the ship was built for one specific role and that, even though it could perform different tasks, it is not a multi-purpose ship. Study of Soviet naval strategy, US naval assault helicopter operations and recent developments during the Moskva's sea trials have strengthened our view that the helicopter carrier is intended primarily for employment in an ASW role.

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4. Characteristics

Although there is general agreement on the characteristics of the ship there are several factors worthy of discussion. Intelligence acquired within the past few weeks is pertinent to at least two of these items:

a. Waterline Beam

The DIA article estimates that the waterline beam is 100 feet and, based upon this beam, that the ship has a displacement of 23,000 tons. Later, more accurate measurements indicate that the figures should be 87 feet and 19,000 tons. While DIA makes a comparison with other ships to indicate ample capacity for amphibious assault, we believe that the comparison is misleading because of the differences in construction, armament and equipment. A preliminary analysis of the weight distribution of the 23,000 tons suggested several thousand tons of possible excess carrying capacity that could be allocated for assault forces; the later figures do not permit such an assessment.

b. Stern Doors

25X1D3a The article says that "the possibility of stern doors cannot be eliminated". Analysis of the construction period indicates that the ship has a closed stern. The hangar deck and elevators occupy the deep bay just below the flight deck. Incorporation of a well deck and stern doors is incompatible with this configuration.

5. Helicopters

a. Model to be Deployed

DIA states that, although the Harp/Hormone military helicopters are most likely to be deployed aboard Moskva, the Hound and Hip types cannot be excluded. The analysis disregards as a valid indicator the size of the elevators which limit their

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use to the Harp/Hormone helicopter. Also disregarded was a Harp/Hormone helicopter seen aboard the Moskva in October 1967. Twenty-three Harp/Hormone type helicopters and 10-12 crates were [REDACTED] at Kacha airfield, site of a known ASW helicopter base in the Crimea; [REDACTED] A

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A few days later the Moskva appeared at anchor a few miles off Kacha. In view of a [REDACTED] statement that helicopters intended for deployment aboard the carrier were located at Kacha, the evidence of an intention to employ Harp/Hormone types is considered conclusive.

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b. ASW Configured

During the past year, deployment of the Hormone aboard Soviet ships has been underway. To date the helicopter has been seen on four space support ships and two submarine tenders. In all cases the helicopters had a radome as well as other suspect electronic devices. Recently a Hormone helicopter similarly configured was shown on Soviet TV participating in an ASW exercise and dropping what appeared to be small depth charges. For these reasons we believe Hormone helicopters deployed aboard Soviet ships are fitted for an ASW role.

6. The Carrier Force

DIA believes that, if ASW is to be the primary role, the construction of only two units indicates either that the Soviets intend to restrict this capability to a single limited ocean area or that they desire to evaluate the performance of the weapon system prior to expending additional resources for more units. We agree with the latter point, i.e., that the Soviets would wish to evaluate the performance of the Moskva and the Leningrad before constructing additional units. The carriers initially may be deployed to the Mediterranean Sea, because of the current high level of naval [REDACTED] in that area and favorable conditions for conducting operations against US submarines. However,

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we believe, that if successful, the helicopter carriers will not be restricted to the Mediterranean but will be directed against the Polaris submarine force elsewhere.

7. Soviet Requirements

The DIA article speaks of an "obvious" Soviet "need for an intervention force". However, at the time the Moskva was designed, 1961-62, Soviet writings concerning their naval requirements indicated primary concern with the growing US strategic threat and ASW was emerging as a critical requirement. Since then, as part of the effort to improve their ASW capabilities, the Soviets have expanded a number of programs. They are developing new attack submarines, patrol aircraft, helicopters and surface ships. Efforts are underway toward production of variable depth sonar, submarine mounted sonar, hydroacoustic detection systems and antisubmarine weapons. Kashin class frigates have been redesignated as ASW ships and the new Kresta class cruisers are equipped to carry two helicopters in a hangar. Large surface combatants, all of which are equipped with helicopter landing pads, are well suited to operate with the Moskva in an ASW task force.

8. Vertical Assault

a. Fleet Support

The Mediterranean Squadron is the only deployed surface force which has operated in distant waters on a continuing basis. As presently configured, even with the Moskva included, this force cannot land an assault force against a defended shore. The Soviets would require a logistic supply force and additional landing ships. If, by the term "intervention," DIA means a capability to land troops without opposition, the Moskva could be used but then so could a variety of other ships including standard cargo ships.

b. Operating Limitations

US experience in operating helicopter carriers in a vertical assault ~~has~~ has revealed

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a number of problem areas if the Moskva is to be used as a key part of an intervention force. These relate to the fundamental problem of the race against time which must dominate such operations in order to ensure survival of the assault troops. The US initial effort was a conversion of an existing aircraft carrier. This ship had five landing spots and a somewhat tortuous system for movement of supplies. Limitations caused by the movement of materiel and the handling of helicopters caused unacceptable delays in the build-up and supply of forces in a drop zone. Under optimum conditions 9 hours were required to land a complete marine battalion landing team.

The US then developed the LPH's which had eight landing spots and specially designed cargo handling facilities. Even so the flight deck (about 600 feet) restricted capabilities and the US has now evolved a concept using converted Essex class carriers and LPH's together.

The flight deck of the Moskva (285 feet) not only restricts helicopter operations due to turbulence across the flight deck created by the large superstructure forward but assault operations ~~there~~ would be restricted to two landing positions because of the need for helicopter refueling and maintenance cycles. This small area, combined with difficulties in maintaining logistic flow stemming from location of its two small elevators would limit troop movement to a force of company size, about 200 men.

9. Dual Role

The concept of dual role, i.e., the ability to carry out an ASW mission and a vertical assault mission interchangeably, probably is not workable. The use of helicopters and ships in the two roles require differences in equipment configuration and training which are incompatible.

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10. ASW Associations

All intelligence received to date which bears directly on the role intended by the Soviets for these ships appears ASW related.

a. A possible, large sonar dome was observed in June 1967 at the Nikolayev shipyard alongside the Leningrad while it was being outfitted, suggesting that the carriers are sonar equipped.

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c. On 23 October 1967, Moskva was at sea in an ASW associated exercise involving a submarine, several surface ships and four Black Sea Fleet aircraft.

11. Minesweeping

The US is beginning to use helicopters in a minesweeping role but this use is limited to very shallow water which would be inconsistent with Moskva's ocean-going capability. The suggestion of a minesweeping role for the Moskva class appears almost frivolous. They are heavily built and armed surface combatants of cruiser size. A preliminary assessment of their cost suggests that it is probably in the upper portion of the range between 100 and 200 million dollars each.

12. Command Ship

We agree that the Moskva can be used as a command ship. Such use is predicated on size rather than the military capabilities of the ship. Cruisers of the Sverdlov, Kynda, and Kresta classes have been used in such a manner as have submarine tenders of the Ugra and Don classes.

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